

# South Central District Office Weathers January Ice Storm

*By Michael Jones, SCDO-DEA*

The New Year was only a few days old when a severe ice storm caused extensive damage in the South Central District (SCD). The ice storm blanketed most of the nine counties in the SCD temporarily leaving thousands without power. The damage was so extensive that Gov. Kathleen Sebelius included all nine counties in a State of Disaster Emergency declaration on Jan. 3. The nine counties in the SCD are Butler, Chase, Cowley, Harper, Harvey, Kingman, Reno, Sedgwick, and Sumner.

Visually, the ice storm sculpted the SCD into a winter wonderland. Ice completely encased trees and plants from top to bottom. However, this also included power lines and telephones lines. Many of the power outages were due to downed tree limbs falling on power lines. Oil spills from pole-mounted transformers were also encountered during the ice storm. Most of the spills were small and a remediation contractor excavated the stained soil for appropriate disposal. Additional inspections of the transformers will be conducted as clean up from the ice storm progresses.



To compound the power outages, there were seven public water supplies that issued Boil Water Notices. Cities and water districts that issued Boil Water Notices include: Conway Springs, Garden Plain, Norwich, Potwin, Viola, Butler County RWD No. 2, and Sumner County RWD No. 5. A Boil Water Notice is a notification that advises residents to boil tap water used for drinking, cooking, and ice-making until bacteriological tests verify the water is safe. It is not necessary to boil water for showering or other external uses.

Water suppliers are required to notify customers to boil water when water samples indicate contamination or when conditions exist that make the water supply vulnerable to contamination. These conditions include a drop in system pressure to below 20 lbs/in<sup>2</sup>, a break in a major distribution line, a malfunction of the treatment system, or a cross-connection to a contaminated water supply.

Boiling is considered one of the safest and most effective methods of water disinfection. Vigorous boiling for two minutes will kill any disease-causing microorganisms and parasites present in water. The flat taste of boiled water can be improved by aeration (pouring it back and forth from one container to another). All Boil Water Notices were rescinded by Jan. 14.

Due to the numerous downed trees and tree limbs, the SCD began contacting landfills, county emergency preparedness directors, and city officials to identify if KDHE could assist. Many of the county landfills and city collection sites were planning on a disposal combination of burning, chipping, or mulching the tree limbs and brush they received. The SCD provided information on permitting additional temporary burn sites, if necessary. Once collection of the downed tree limbs is completed, disposal by burning, chipping, or mulching may take several months.



After the ice storm, there were many piles of tree limbs scattered throughout Wichita neighborhoods. Picking up the debris the ice storm left behind will be very costly. The Wichita crews are receiving assistance from contractors across the United States. This includes hauling trucks, loading equipment, and bucket trucks for cutting limbs out of the trees. Wichita hopes to obtain FEMA assistance. On Jan. 18, Gov. Sebelius requested federal assistance to help

Kansans recover from the effects of the severe ice storm. The Governor's request seeks assistance for 32 counties, which includes all of the SCD counties.

Working with the Wichita Public Works Department and the Department of Environmental Health, the SCD was able to authorize an emergency disposal site for tree limb collection and disposal to facilitate an intensive city effort to clear streets and neighborhoods of downed limbs and brush.



During the January 2005 ice storm the cities and communities of the SCD were severely impacted by the loss of power, loss of communications, and impassable roads. Members of the KDHE South Central District Office are proud they were able to aid local governments in expediting recovery activities to restore county, city, and community services.